

The Business of Communicating with the Media

Bill Patterson



Tips for more successful relations with the news media.

The new definition of a bad day: arriving at work to find a "60 Minutes" news crew camped in the front lobby.

But even a routine call from a local reporter is enough to cause panic in many. "What do they want?" "What do I say?" "Why me?" they ask.

Increasingly, business and legal news is front page news, no longer relegated to the back pages next to stock tables. Legal news is hot. And that leads to the real question: is your company or agency ready for intensive news scrutiny?

To deal with the media, many persons have learned "journalistic jujitsu," which uses the media's strengths—their desire for a story—to advantage. Release the story . . . but control the flow of negative information in a responsible manner. By being candid and careful, you can turn a bad situation into a positive public relations opportunity for your agency.

But understanding the media and learning how to deal with reporters is not something that can be absorbed through osmosis. Professionals are learning new techniques for dealing with intense media situations. Terms such as "Bump and Run," "Nuggets," and "Bridging" are being

used to teach persons how to respond in a positive manner.

They are learning how to quickly "bump" very negative questions, then "run" to their positive comment on the situation.

The "nugget" is another simple technique, yet often forgotten in the heat and glare of a tense news interview. Keep your answer short and to the point (20 seconds maximum) and don't babble on with more than you need to say.

"Bridge" an unfair question with a quick phrase: "That's an interesting point, Tom, but the bigger question here is what our firm has done to improve the situation. For instance . . ."

Basically, the message remains the same: be honest, be candid, and beware. Assemble the facts pertinent to the story. Know what you want to say. Candor receives more positive attention than "No comment."

The surprising result of candor is that credibility is enhanced among those who matter most.

Besides increased credibility, being candid with a reporter usually gets his or her attention. More than likely, a reporter who has been treated fairly will take a second look at future news releases, rather than pitch them in the round file. The upshot is positive coverage of those "good news" items you want to get before the public.

Dealing with the media is not something to be passed off to other staff members or dismissed as unimportant. It begins with a commitment to learn and follow basic guidelines, such as:

- Answering questions as directly and briefly as you can in a positive manner
- Making yourself accessible to reporters
- Providing supplemental information in the form of fact sheets
- Having a professional understanding of the media's needs.

Just as important, *do not*:

- Mislead or lie
- Say "no comment"
- Argue with reporters.

Remember, they have the last word.

The list of do's and don'ts could cover pages. But what is important is the recognition that dealing with the media requires special techniques and commitment to understand journalists.

By learning the "how to's" of media relations, you can calmly walk through the door of their firms, even if "60 Minutes" is waiting in the lobby.

What the heck! Invite them in for some coffee and a chat. 

Subscribe to Right of Way

The only publication for real property professionals involved in the acquisition, appraisal, management, and disposal of rights-of-way properties.

Each issue is specifically focused to give the right-of-way practitioner a greater knowledge of his/her profession.

To subscribe send \$ 16.00 to:

IRWA - Suite 515
9920 LaCienega Blvd.
Inglewood, CA 90301

Name _____

Company _____

Address _____

Bill Patterson is Vice President of The Corporate Communicator, Columbus, OH and presents seminars in news media relations.